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ABSTRACT

This report results from a community forum on educational equity in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, at which knowledgeable persons and school district personnel provided their perspectives on issues related to educational equity. Data from this forum reveal a serious problem in the large numbers of student suspensions at both the elementary and secondary school levels. The report also shows that different methods are used to count dropouts at the school district and state levels. The Advisory Committee on Civil Rights also received information about the use of waivers to exempt Hispanic students from taking the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The school district claims that exclusion is for the benefit of limited English proficient students, but community advocates claim that the waiver is a form of discrimination that targets Hispanic students and does not allow the school district to assess their educational potential properly. Several presenters at the forum recommended that the number of bilingual teachers and bilingual school personnel be increased, the curriculum be improved, and that there should be more parental involvement, with the removal of barriers that hamper communications. Appendixes contain the conference agenda and a report on the testing data from one elementary school. (SLD)

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ED 446 160

Equal Educational Opportunity for Hispanic Students in the Oklahoma City Public Schools

Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights

May 2000

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A report of the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. Statements and viewpoints in the report should not be attributed to the Commission, but only to the Advisory Committee or participants in the community forum.

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Equal Educational Opportunity for Hispanic Students in the Oklahoma City Public Schools

Letter of Transmittal

Oklahoma Advisory Committee to
the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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The Oklahoma Advisory Committee submits this summary report, *Equal Educational Opportunity for Hispanic Students in the Oklahoma City Public Schools*. As part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues in Oklahoma, the Advisory Committee on September 29, 1998, held a community forum on educational equity in Oklahoma City. The Committee invited knowledgeable persons and school district personnel to provide their perspectives on the subject noted above.

The Advisory Committee found that there is a serious problem in the large number of student suspensions at both the elementary and secondary schools in the school district. The Committee's review also showed that there are different methods and procedures for counting dropouts at the school district and State levels.

The Advisory Committee also received information on the use of waivers to exempt Hispanic students from taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The school district claims that the exemption is for the benefit of limited-English-proficient students. However, community advocates claim that the waiver is a form of discrimination that targets Hispanic students and does not allow the school district to properly assess their educational potential. Overall several presenters recommended that the number of bilingual teachers and bilingual school personnel be increased, more improvement to the curriculum, more parental involvement, and removing the language barriers that hamper communications.

The Advisory Committee believes that the school district, community agencies, and the Hispanic Advisory Committee to the school district working together in Oklahoma City are capable of improving education for the students of color in the areas of school suspensions, dropouts, testing programs, and curriculum innovations.

The Advisory Committee hopes that the community forum and the information received from the presenters will be beneficial to the residents of Oklahoma City.

Respectfully,

Stephanie C. Hudson

Stephanie C. Hudson, *Chairperson*
Oklahoma Advisory Committee

Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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I. Background

As early as September 1997, the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights began discussing the serious issue of student suspensions and educational equity in the Oklahoma City public schools (OCPS) and its effect on the Hispanic community.[1] In addition, at an Advisory Committee meeting the Latino Community Development Agency observed that Hispanic students in OCPS appear to be a target of the district's policy to exempt students from taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) given every spring.[2] With respect to suspension of students, the Advisory Committee took note of a statement from the Children's Defense Fund that:

> the great majority of suspensions do not serve any demonstrated valid interest of children or schools. Instead, they harm the children involved, and jeopardize the prospects for securing a decent education. Suspension pushes children and their problems into the street, thereby causing more problems for them and for the rest of us. . . . Finally, suspensions are not necessary, except in a small minority of cases, to maintain order. . . .[3]

The fund pointed out further that "discriminatory attitudes and habits once apparent in blatantly dual school systems now simply reflect themselves in the so-called 'second generation' desegregation problems involving discriminatory discipline tracking and special education placement."[4]

No More Excuses, the final report of the Hispanic Dropout Project, a study of Hispanic education, documented 3 years of research and field hearings on the dropout crisis.[5] Some of the key findings in the study were:

1. The economic and social consequences of high dropout rates for Hispanic communities are significant and warrant national attention.
2. Many Hispanic students dropout due to such school-related factors as crumbling, overcrowded, and unsafe schools; lack of teachers with appropriate training and language abilities; lowered academic expectations; and unresponsive school bureaucracies that discourage parental participation.
3. At roughly one-third, the Hispanic dropout rate is higher than any other major segment of the American population.
4. Hispanic students are often concentrated in areas with fewer educational resources (uncertified teachers, college-preparatory classes, computer access).[6]

According to Advisory Committee members, the alleged high rate of student suspensions and dropouts appears to be a national crisis that justified a review of the Oklahoma City public schools' student discipline policy.[7]

On September 29, 1998, the Oklahoma Advisory Committee met in Oklahoma City to conduct a community forum on equal educational opportunity for Hispanic students in the Oklahoma City public schools. The purpose of the forum was to collect information on selected educational issues, including education equity affecting Hispanic students in the public schools of

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[1] Oklahoma State Advisory Committee (SAC) to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, meeting minutes, Stillwater, OK, Sept. 11, 1998, (hereafter cited as Oklahoma SAC minutes).

[2] Memorandum to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights from the Latino Community Development Agency, May 26, 1997.

[3] Children's Defense Fund, *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* (Washington, DC: Children Defense Fund, 1975), p. 9. *See also* the Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *A Statement on School Suspensions in Selected Iowa's School Districts*, February 1980.

[4] Ibid.

[5] *No More Excuses*, the Hispanic Dropout Project, February 1998. This project was commissioned by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley on Sept. 18, 1995.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Oklahoma SAC minutes.

Oklahoma City.[8] The Committee also reviewed information provided by forum participants on the effect of the school district's discipline policy on student suspensions and dropout rates of Hispanics.[9] Further, the Committee also received information on ITBS exemptions and the training of bilingual assistants.[10] The forum presenters included university professors, a State legislator, students, parents, agency officials, and school district personnel.[11]

According to the school district's annual report, the district is a model urban school district and is an integral part of the community.[12] Its students are self-confident and ready to compete in a global society.[13] It has highly motivated, professionally competent employees who work together with parents and the community to provide innovative and effective education programs.[14] Its mission is to educate students for life-learning and responsible living. A few of the 1997–2002 goals for the school district are:

1. To have all students read at their appropriate level.
2. To provide students in every classroom with an equal opportunity to learn, to be critical thinkers, technologically literate, and effective communicators.
3. To provide safe, clean, well-maintained buildings and grounds with adequate space for educational needs.[15]

The school district, in an attempt to maintain order and structure for student behavior, published the following discipline information in the student handbook:

1. Suspended students are not allowed to return to the campus of the school from which they were suspended, another district school or attend extra-curricular activities sponsored by the OCPS until the expiration of their suspension. Any student in violation of this policy is subject to arrest for trespassing and/or additional days of suspension.

2. School administrators are responsible for ensuring that students' due process rights are not violated. Administrators will furnish written notice of the alleged charges to the student and his/her parent(s).The notice will provide an explanation of the charge and a discussion of the evidence regarding the charge. The notice will also provide a meeting date to give the student an opportunity to present.[16]

[8] Transcript of the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Oklahoma City, OK, Sept. 29, 1998, p. 6.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 10.

[12] Oklahoma City Public Schools, Statistical Profile 1996–97, Management Information Services, September 1997, p. 2.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Student and Parent Handbook, Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1997–98, p. 20.

II. Academic Perspective

Dr. Herman Curiel, associate professor, School of Social Work, University of Oklahoma, provided the Advisory Committee some information on the educational and social needs of Hispanics in Oklahoma. As background, he noted that the Oklahoma City public schools have a diverse minority student population, which is 40 percent African American, 35 percent white, 16 percent Hispanic, 4 percent American Indian, and 3 percent Asian.[1] In 1997, 74 percent of the district's students were eligible for either free or reduced price lunch. Of the 6,621 Hispanics enrolled, 4,324 were eligible for free lunch. Also in the same year, 5,739 students were enrolled in special education and 1,786 student dropouts were recorded for the district.[2]

The OCPS, which serves the inner city and other needy areas, is 1 of 17 school districts in the Greater Oklahoma City area.[3] The ethnic imbalance of the student population does not reflect the city's population. For example, Oklahoma City is 16 percent African American and around 4 or 5 percent Hispanic.[4]

Dr. Curiel said that the school district has experienced a tremendous enrollment growth of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. He reported that in the 1997–98 academic year 6,542 students were identified as LEP. For a majority of these children, the home language was Spanish.[5]

Dr. Curiel said 540 Hispanic students were enrolled in special education classes.[6] He described the Even Start Family Literacy program, which is designed to provide concurrent childhood, adult, and parent education to its participants. It targets low-income families with limited formal education.[7] Most of the families who participate in Even Start are of Hispanic background. The goal of the program was to serve 120 families. However, Dr. Curiel recommended that the school district expand its transitional bilingual education program to grades two and three at the current Even Start sites, and offer the same program at schools where there is a concentration of LEP students.[8]

Dr. Curiel stated that bilingual education is often misunderstood by the general public, legislators, and even some educators. It is a teaching method using both English and a student's native language and is particularly designed for non-English-speaking students.[9] He further said:

> Critics view time spent becoming literate in the child's major language as time lost, because they're not learning English. The assumption is that all children can progress at the same rate, regardless of ability to comprehend instruction. And bilingual education is designed for those students who commence schools as non-English speakers. The initial goal is for the children to learn to read and write what they already speak. So it's from a position of strength: you teach them what they already know. And once the children have received some level of native language literacy, children are introduced to English.[10]

According to Dr. Curiel's research findings on the effects of bilingual background education and its relationship to dropout rates in Houston, Texas, many children who do not have the benefit of bilingual education, who are poor, and of Mexican heritage had to repeat school grades.[11]

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[1] Herman Curiel, Statement before the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Oklahoma City, OK, Sept. 29, 1998, Transcript, p. 12 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 12–13.

[4] Ibid., p. 13.

[5] Ibid., pp. 13–14. An Oklahoma City Public Schools evaluation report to U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Jan. 22, 1998, noted that 5,485, or 85 percent, of LEP students were Spanish speaking.

[6] Herman Curiel, Transcript, pp. 13–14.

[7] Ibid., p. 15.

[8] Ibid., pp. 15–16.

[9] Ibid., p. 16.

[10] Ibid., pp. 16–17.

[11] Ibid., p. 17.

His research further indicated that children who were in bilingual education classes in the early years did well in high school compared with those without the bilingual educational experience, who more frequently became school dropouts.[12]

Dr. April Haulman, a professor in curriculum and instruction from the University of Central Oklahoma, provided the Advisory Committee with information on State testing regulations and exemption from testing regulations. She began by saying that there is a requirement for achievement testing in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11.[13] However, there was an acknowledged need to exempt students receiving special education. Dr. Haulman said:

> It also was believed by advocates for language minority students at that time that exemptions should also be extended to protect the limited- and non-English-proficient students from being assessed with inappropriate instruments, namely tests standardized and normed on English-speaking students.[14]

Dr. Haulman told the Committee that limited English proficient refers to:

> individuals who were not born in the U.S. or whose native language is a language other than English, individuals who come from environments where language other than English is dominant. . . . where language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency and who, by reason thereof, has sufficient difficulty reading, writing, and understanding the English language to deny such individuals the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in society.[15]

Students in local school districts in Oklahoma may be exempted from the State school testing program during their first 3 years of enrollment if the following conditions have been met:

1. For every LEP student exempted, the local district must have on file verification that the student is receiving special instruction designed for a specific purpose of improving the LEP student's English proficiency.
2. The local school district must have on file record of having notified the LEP student's parents or legal guardians of the option of requesting that their child be exempted from participating in the testing program.[16]

Dr. Haulman stated that the 3-year timeframe for test exemptions was based on research findings on how long it takes to learn communication skills.[17] However, she noted:

> These tests grossly and unfairly underestimate the LEP student's cognitive functioning and achievement in content areas. A non-English-proficient, limited-English-proficient student will receive a low score on these tests, not because they do not know some of the concepts or information on the test but because they do not understand the language of the test and test instructions. The test about science concepts should measure science concepts. For LEP students, it measures the student's ability to read the question in English. This process can be a very humiliating, painful, and demoralizing situation for the student, resulting in low self-esteem and possibly lowered self-expectations. Using these types of tests unfairly underestimates a student's progress from one year to the next. Typically, LEP students assessed in English are 25 to 30 percentile ranks behind their English-speaking peers, constituting about two and a half to three grade levels.
>
> In order to close this achievement gap as measured by the English instruments, LEP students must outperform their English-speaking peers in progress over the course of several years. The LEP student who enters schools 3 years behind in English when measured through these tests must make 15 years of progress; the normal 12 years of progress plus 3 years of catch-up achievement during the 12 years of schooling, whereas English-speaking students are making 12 years' progress in 12 years of schooling. The test scores for LEP students from one year to the next shows students making a year's worth of progress as measured by a test, but those results would still be way behind their English-speaking peers. Teachers, on the basis of this, may actually lower their estimation and expectations for LEP students because of these low scores and thus not provide the same challenging content-area instructions to LEP students.[18]

Dr. Haulman said that achievement tests are often used as high stakes decisionmaking guides.

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[12] Ibid., p. 20.

[13] April Haulman, Transcript, p. 78.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 79.

[16] Ibid., p. 80.

[17] Ibid., pp. 81–82.

[18] Ibid., pp. 81–83.

High stakes refers to the practice of using test results for such purposes as grade level retention or advancement.[19] When test results are used for assessing the quality or the performance of a school district, it sometimes puts pressure on students, teachers, and administrators. Ultimately, the concern is the resulting educational damage to the LEP student's morale and self-image.[20]

Dr. Haulman suggested that schools can be overly sensitive to being labeled at-risk for low-achievement performance and may actually encourage parents to sign waivers for testing when they are not warranted if they believe that students will not perform at the standard levels.[21]

Oklahoma school officials were concerned that a 3-year exemption would not be enough for students to make adequate progress in their English proficiency. This fear was based on research findings indicating that for LEP children, in addition to learning basic interpersonal communication skills, it may take 5 to 10 years to develop the cognitive academic language proficiency equivalent of their English-speaking peers.[22]

Dr. Haulman also mentioned that the funding formula for the school districts offered by the State Department of Education provided supplemental money based on the number of limited-English-proficient students who are reported annually to the State.[23] She was very concerned about the lack of a tracking system for funds set aside to provide additional services for the LEP student. She has advocated for better management of LEP-targeted funds and better assessment of proficiency in language acquisition and curriculum content in the support program for LEP students.[24]

Dr. Haulman said the test exemption was "never intended to release teachers and schools of any accountability for providing English language development, as well as access to full curriculum."[25]

Dr. Haulman also pointed out:

> And there is some benefit to giving these types of tests for students that are beginning to make progress, probably not in the early stages of no English proficiency, but as they begin to acquire more and more English proficiency, they still may be identified as limited English proficient and may not be achieving at the norms of their English-speaking peers. There could be some benefit for the teachers and educational planners and for parents to gauge how quickly they are approaching those norms. So there are some advantages to giving them the test. And when the schools are reluctant to give them the test because those figures, then, would be counted against them if they are not achieving at the norm levels for the rest of the school, they are not being held accountable, often, for the kind of educational programming they can offer the student.[26]

When asked about the pushout and dropout rates for LEP students, Dr. Haulman noted:

> But I know one of the things that you often hear when you hear bilingual education being under fire like in States like California, you hear that all this money that the United States has put into bilingual education after all these years, we still have one of the highest dropout rates among our limited English proficient. And why is it? Because it's failed.
>
> Well, the truth of the matter is that good quality bilingual instruction has never been offered to everybody anyway. And those high dropout rates are still occurring among the students that are not receiving quality education. This is one thing that the research has found: students that are receiving native language support longer, even if they are in the mainstream classes where all the instruction is English but they receive native language support and there is still communication in the native language of the home with parent, then kids are persisting in their education longer.
>
> Parents are staying involved longer in education. Most parent involvement drops out considerably after elementary school anyway. But parents will drop out after the first 2 years if there's nobody to talk to at school. If the teacher doesn't speak their language and there's nobody there to translate, the parents will withdraw immediately.
>
> And when you compound that with the fact that many of our limited-English-proficient parents are coming with a different kind of cultural expectation to the school, they're not as likely to challenge authority or to assert that their children's rights are not being met, or needs are not being met, because from differ-

[19] Ibid., p. 83.

[20] Ibid., pp. 83–84.

[21] Ibid., p. 84.

[22] Ibid., p. 81.

[23] Ibid., pp. 85–86.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 84.

[26] Ibid., p. 85.

ent cultural perspectives, teachers are held in higher esteem than they are in our society, unfortunately.

But the offshoot of that is that parents often will not challenge, even if there is someone there to translate, because culturally, they have a different perspective.

It is so critical that the teachers make an effort to encourage and involve parents and show them how they can be involved both at the classroom level and at the building level so that they not only understand their rights as parents, but they understand how they can enrich their children's experiences at home. Because when that bond is strong between the home and the school and the child, the children will persist in school longer.[27]

[27] Ibid., pp. 100–01.

III. Community Perspective

When reviewing educational issues, the school district administrative office is a good source for information. Likewise, to provide a balance of viewpoints, community input from parents, students, and education advocates becomes important. The Advisory Committee received information from three community persons.

Amy Nazario, a parent and social worker who has worked in the Latino community of Oklahoma City, spoke to the Advisory Committee about her experience with the Oklahoma City public schools. Ms. Nazario thought that because she was Hispanic and had an accent, school personnel assumed that her son would have problems with language. However, her son has an English surname and speaks English as a language with no accent. But when Ms. Nazario would attend her son's elementary school's open house, she was always given a waiver form for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).[1] She asked why she was given a waiver form, and the school's representative responded that, since her son was from a household where Spanish was spoken he would have problems with the test.[2] Ms. Nazario thought it was strange that a school official was predicting problems in September for an achievement test that would be taken the following April.[3] She never did sign the waivers.[4]

Ms. Nazario's second encounter with the testing issue in the schools was as a sponsor of the Latino Leadership Club at Jackson Middle School. One spring morning, she told her students that she would not be at school the following week because no activities were allowed during the week that the ITBS was administered.[5] Students in the Latino Leadership Club suggested to Ms. Nazario that she could go on a field trip to the zoo with them because they were not going to take the test. In the ensuing conversation with the club members, Ms. Nazario learned that their parents had signed the waiver forms that exempted them from taking the test.[6] She learned from the club members that there were concerns that Latino students would lower the test results.[7]

Sergio Gallegos, Jr., is the chairperson of the Hispanic Advisory Committee to the Oklahoma City public schools. The Hispanic Advisory Committee has set a positive 5-year agenda to help Superintendent Marvin Crawford and the school district better understand the educational needs of the Hispanic community.[8] Mr. Gallegos said he was most passionate about the issue of exemption of students from taking the test of basic skills.[9] He said that the exemption policy robs students from participation in enrichment programs.[10] Mr. Gallegos was of the opinion that exemption from taking the ITBS institutes the mentality in Hispanic children that they can no longer take exams because they might be handicapped, less capable, and less intelligent than their contemporaries.[11] He further stated that when a student does not take the ITBS, the classroom teacher has inadequate, incomplete information available to focus and reinforce the student's academic ability.[12] Consequently, many students are moved up to their next grade without having the skills necessary to be suc-

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[1] Amy Nazario, Statement before the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Oklahoma City, Sept. 29, 1998, Transcript, p. 113 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 115.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 116.

[8] Sergio Gallegos, Jr., Transcript, p. 128.

[9] Ibid., p. 132.

[10] Ibid., p. 139.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., pp. 140–41.

cessful at the next level.[13] The result of delaying the education of students through exemption policies creates a mediocre education and a mediocre student who does not achieve his or her potential. These school district exemption procedures reinforces the stereotype that students cannot compete equally with those students who do take the ITBS test. Mr. Gallegos added that in real life there are no exemptions, and all people are judged under the same standards and are expected to compete.[14] He also said that providing Hispanic bilingual counselors and teachers in the schools would be helpful in removing the communication obstacle for many students.[15]

Johnny Charqueno, a senior at Northwest Classen High School and a member of the Latino Leadership Club, provided the Advisory Committee with a student's perspective on the educational services he has received and observed in the Oklahoma City public schools.[16] He told the Advisory Committee that some of his friends who were exempted from the ITBS were just glad they did not have to take another test and could spend the week watching movies.[17] The disadvantage, he said, was that if a student did not take the test because of the exemption waiver signed by parents, he or she could not go to Classen High School, a school that has enrichment classes.[18]

Mr. Charqueno stated that many of his friends dropped out because they had been suspended a long time and also because of parent conferences.[19] At parent-teacher conferences, parents spoke only Spanish and nobody translated and the parents were scared of talking to the principal and not understanding the conversation. In the case of the suspended students, if they have six unexcused absences they would fail the semester and there was no reason for returning to school. They become "dropout statistics," he said.[20]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Johnny Charqueno, Transcript, p. 214.

[17] Ibid., p. 215.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 220.

[20] Ibid.

IV. Service Agency Perspective

Community service agencies, by nature of their mission statements, come in contact with students who need ancillary services to improve their quality of life. Both Ruth B. Mazaheri and Wayne Thompson have provided significant program activities for students enrolled in the Oklahoma City public schools.

Ms. Mazaheri, the director of programs for the Latino Community Development Agency, with 17 years of service in community mental health, spoke to the Advisory Committee about local educational issues.[1] The first issue she discussed was the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Ms. Mazaheri explained that the purpose of the test is to assess where the students are academically. She suggested to the Committee that in some Oklahoma City schools, the ITBS has become the measure for how well the school is doing.[2] Ms. Mazaheri gave the example of the Columbus Elementary School, which at the time was a candidate for an enterprise school.[3] An enterprise school is allowed to introduce educational innovations with limited supervision by the school district. However, it was the contention of Ms. Mazaheri that Columbus Elementary was a school that exempted a large number of Hispanic students from taking the ITBS.[4] She used information from the school district's Management Information Services to show that in 1997, 650 students were enrolled at Columbus; 439, or 67 percent, of the students were of Hispanic origin, and 398 of these Hispanic students were eligible to take the Iowa Test.[5] However, only 139 of these 398 Hispanic students took the ITBS.[6] The school district exempted 214, or 49 percent, of Hispanic students from taking the test.[7] Ms. Mazaheri said the school continues this practice of test-taking exemptions. She emphasized that the Columbus Elementary has been represented as one of the leaders with high scores in the Iowa Test but that the reality of the numbers suggests that the Columbus Elementary School's high performance in the Iowa Test is related to the high number of exemptions.[8] She stated that students exempted from taking the test pay the price of not being properly assessed to achieve their academic potential.[9]

Ms. Mazaheri noted the inconsistency within the school district's elementary schools. Some schools exempt a large number of Hispanic students from taking the ITBS while others exempt a small number of Hispanics and choose to accept the challenge of teaching all students.[10]

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[1] Ruth B. Mazaheri, Statement before the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Oklahoma City, Sept. 29, 1998, Transcript, p. 224 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 225.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., pp. 225–26.

[9] Ibid., p. 226.

[10] Ibid., p. 227.

V. School District Perspective

The Oklahoma Advisory Committee invited the school superintendent, Marvin Crawford, to address the Committee. However, the school district delegated the task to Dr. Vern Moore, the deputy superintendent.[1]

Dr. Moore provided the vision statement for the Hispanic Student Services unit in the district.[2] The unit's mission is to provide the opportunity for educational services to all students and ensure that it brings into play the cultural and linguistically diverse students to make sure that they are able to speak English and are given the skills to be successful.[3]

Dr. Moore provided statistics that showed an increasing number of Hispanic students in the district (from 3,622 in 1995 to 4,168 in 1998) who have taken the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).[4] Likewise there was an increase in the number of students who were exempted from the ITBS testing program during the same timeframe of fall 1995 through spring 1998.[5]

According to Dr. Moore, Oklahoma public schools provide limited-English-proficient (LEP) students with appropriate instruction to enable these students to achieve competency in English in as short a time period as possible.[6] The school district's objective is to prepare the LEP student to participate successfully in the mainstream classroom. Dr. Moore further said that State guidelines indicate that students should not be in an program more than 4 years. This means that a LEP student may only be exempted from the ITBS during a total of 4 years of enrollment in Oklahoma schools.[7] The school district identifies limited-English-proficient students as:

> those youngsters who [were] born in the United States or whose native language is other than English; those individuals who are Native American or Alaska native and who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on such student's level of English language proficiency or those students who are migratory whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant.[8]

According to Dr. Moore, beginning in the 1997–98 school year, all public school districts are required to administer the norm-referenced ITBS to all students in grades 3 and 7 and the criterion-referenced tests to all students in grades 5, 8, and 11.[9] Exemption of students from the administration of these tests will be limited to students whose education is subject to the provisions of an Individualized Education Program.[10] Students may be exempt from participating in the Oklahoma School Testing Program provided they have met certain conditions. One condition, for example, is that the local district shall have on file a record of having notified parents or legal guardians of LEP students of the option of requesting that their child be exempted from participating in the testing program.[11] According to Dr. Moore, the documentation and records of all the school district students who are eligible and are exempted from taking the ITBS

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[1] Dr. Vern Moore, Statement before the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Oklahoma City, Sept. 29, 1998, Transcript, p. 173. (hereafter cited as Transcript).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., pp. 173–74.

[4] Ibid., p. 174.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 176.

[8] Ibid., pp. 176–77.

[9] Presentation Paper, Dr. Vern L. Moore, Oklahoma City Public Schools, before the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Sept. 29, 1998, p. 6 (hereafter cited as Presentation Paper).

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 7.

are kept on file and readily available for review by any interested party.[12]

During the enrollment years that LEP students are exempted from the Oklahoma School Testing Program, they are required to receive instruction in the regular classroom or in language centers staffed by a teacher and a bilingual assistant.[13] Dr. Moore stated that the recommended classroom ratio is 60 percent LEP students and 40 percent non-LEP students, in grades six through eight. Instructions at these language centers are provided by English as a second language teachers and bilingual assistants who are available for tutorial services in the content area.[14]

On the Oklahoma City public school student dropout issue, Dr. Moore shared with the Advisory Committee information over a 2-year timeframe, school years 1996–97 and 1997–98. The total of student dropouts for 1995–96 was 1,199, which included 72 American Indians, 40 Asian Americans, 488 blacks, 160 Hispanics, and 439 white students. For the 1996–97 school year there was a total of 1,062 dropouts: 57 American Indians, 94 Asian Americans, 356 blacks, 168 Hispanics, and 387 whites.[15]

In addition to dropout figures, Dr. Moore gave information on student suspensions for middle school and high school students. He said that urban school districts are "not necessarily proud of suspension statistics," and the school district is working to reduce the numbers of suspensions.[16] For elementary and secondary students in the school year 1997–98, American Indians accounted for 200 suspensions; Asian Americans, 46; blacks, 4,100; Hispanics, 1,016; and whites, 1,937 making a total of 7,299 student suspensions in the district.[17]

After giving his presentation, the Oklahoma Advisory Committee members asked Dr. Moore questions about the percentage of Hispanic students who were being exempted from taking the ITBS. He previously had suggested that an increasing number of students taking the ITBS was due to the increasing Hispanic student population and the concomitant decrease in Hispanic students being exempted from testing. Dr. Moore was asked why the district wanted Hispanic parents to sign a waiver to exempt their children from testing without any discussion about the need for a waiver and the benefits derived from such action. His response was that the school really makes an effort to ensure that parents understand the exemption procedures, and the procedures do not go forth until the parents understand what they are signing. The schools conduct home visits and conferences to inform the parents about the exemption procedures.[18] According to Dr. Moore, the alleged pressure put on parents to sign waivers to exempt Hispanic students from the testing has been done without the knowledge of the school officials responsible for conducting the testing.[19] Dr. Moore admitted that this emphasis on parental notification was due to concerns raised by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.[20]

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[12] Dr. Vern Moore, Transcript, p. 181.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Presentations, Dr. Moore, op. cit., pp. 11–12.

[16] Ibid., pp. 13–14.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Transcript, p. 192.

[19] Transcript, p. 195.

[20] Ibid., p. 193.

VI. Summary

On September 29, 1998, the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission Civil Rights held a community forum with the purpose of reviewing the equal educational opportunity for Hispanic students in the Oklahoma City public schools. The Advisory Committee received information on school suspension and dropout rates. It also reviewed exemption procedures for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for limited-English-proficient students.

It was determined from information provided at the forum that student suspensions in the school district are a serious problem and one that school officials are not proud of. Oklahoma City school officials said that during the 1997–98 school year, there was a total of 7,299 elementary and secondary student suspensions in the district. American Indians accounted for 200 suspensions; Asians, 46; blacks, 4,100; Hispanics, 1,016; and whites 1,937. In Oklahoma for the 1996–97 school year, the overall student dropout rate was 5.6 percent. For the Oklahoma City public schools, the overall student dropout rate was 13.9 percent, while its Hispanic dropout rate was 15.5 percent.

The issue of waivers for exempting students from taking the annual ITBS brought up several concerns that touched on the importance of language instruction in the school district. Several community participants alleged that Hispanic students were granted waivers not to take the ITBS so that scores would remain high. Further, several presenters suggested that parent involvement could be improved if interpreters were available at school sites to remove the language barrier for limited-English-proficient parents.

The deputy superintendent provided the Committee with information on the role and responsibilities of the school district for teaching all students, emphasizing the needs of Hispanic and other limited-English-proficient students. He said that testing officials were not knowledgeable about the pressure placed on Hispanic parents to sign waivers for taking the ITBS. He also stated that his office has a good system for monitoring additional State funds targeted for the special instruction of bilingual students.

School district officials gave their responses to concerns raised by the Advisory Committee and the Hispanic community on the magnitude of educational equity problems. They said the district was also "sensitive" to the corrective action instructions it is under, resulting from a formal discrimination complaint made to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

There are programs like Even Start and Promises that focus on helping every student, but certainly at-risk students in achieving their potential for leading successful lives in society.

The Oklahoma Advisory Committee hopes that this summary report of the community forum provides information that will be beneficial to the residents of Oklahoma City interested in working with their school districts.

Appendix A

Oklahoma Advisory Committee to
the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

"The Hispanic Student, Equal Education Opportunity
and the Oklahoma City Public Schools"

Clarion Hotel/Comfort Inn Conference Center
4345 North Lincoln Boulevard
Oklahoma City, OK

September 29, 1998

AGENDA

8:45 a.m. **Introductions and Opening Statement**
- Stephanie C. Hudson, Chairperson
  Oklahoma Advisory Committee, USCCR

- Melvin L. Jenkins, Director
  Central Regional Office, USCCR

9:00 a.m. **The Hispanics of Oklahoma**
- Herman Curiel, Ph.D., Associate Professor
  University of Oklahoma, School of Social Work

9:20 a.m. **Federal Government**
- Taylor D. August, Director
  U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Dallas, TX

9:40 a.m. **State Government**
- Dale Wells, Vice Chair, Education Committee
  House of Representatives, District 33, Cushing, OK

10:00 a.m. - Robert Buswell, Executive Director
  Office of Accountability, Education Oversight Board, State of Oklahoma

10:20 a.m. **Community Perspectives**
- April Haulman, Ph.D., Professor
  Bilingual/ESL Education, University of Central Oklahoma-Edmond

10:40 a.m. - Ralph Martinez, Parent
  Oklahoma City Public Schools

11:00 a.m. **Break**

11:10 a.m.	•	Amy Nazario, Parent Oklahoma City Public Schools
11:30 a.m.	•	Johnny Charqueno, Student Latino Leadership Club, Oklahoma City
11:50 a.m.	•	Sergio Gallegos, Jr., Chairperson Hispanic Advisory Committee to the Oklahoma City Public Schools
12:20 p.m.	•	Wayne Thompson, Executive Director Oklahoma Health Care Project, Oklahoma City
12:45 p.m.	•	Maridyth M. McBee, Ph.D., Team Leader Student Assessment, Research & Planning Section, Oklahoma State Department of Education
1:10 p.m.	•	Ruth Mazaheri, Director of Programs Latino Community Development Agency, Oklahoma City
1:30 p.m.	•	Dr. Vern L. Moore, Deputy Superintendent Oklahoma City Public Schools
2:00 p.m.	**Open Session**	
2:20 p.m.	**Adjournment**	

Appendix B

Columbus Elementary School
Testing Data

Information obtained from Oklahoma City Public Schools Management Information Services, the 1996–97 Statistical Profile published in September 1997.

- Columbus Elementary School total student body during 1996–97 school year 650 students.
- 439 (67.5%) of the students were Hispanic origin.
- 398 of the second, third, fourth and fifth graders were eligible to take the Iowa test.
- Only 139 (34%) of the students were given the test last year.
- 214 (49%) of the Hispanic students were exempted from taking the test.
- 54% of the eligible second, third, fourth and fifth grade students were exempted from taking the Iowa Test.

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